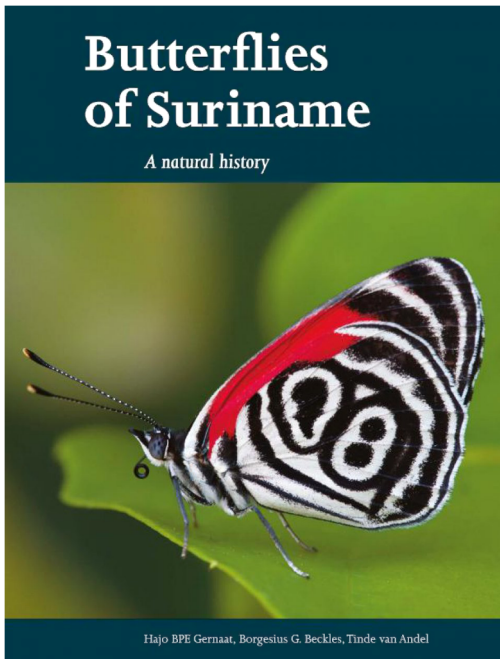


Book review

Hajo B.P.E. Gernaat, Borgesius G. Beckles & Tinde van Andel, 2012. **Butterflies of Suriname, a Natural History**. KIT publishers. Hardback, 696 pages, many colour photographs. ISBN 9789460221712, price €49.50.



This heavy volume is the first book on Surinam Butterflies in a very long time. The book is divided into four parts. The first part is a broad introduction with general information on nomenclature of the Latin names and classification and further deals with geography, geology and soil of Suriname. The second part, written by the third author, provides information on plants, such as plant anatomy and physiology and the diversity of plants in Suriname. Further it introduces rainforest and the natural habitats of Suriname.

Part III introduces the butterflies in subjects such as morphology, life history and parasites and predators. It also deals with the many mimicry rings in Neotropical butterflies and illustrates some of these very convincingly in colour plates of set specimens. A special aspect of butterflies from Suriname is that several species have been described already in the 18th century in the famous books by Cramer and Stoll. The senior author lists the types that have been found again in the Leiden collections and shows them on plates. The fourth part is a species account for 150 common and remarkable butterfly species all shown on plates. Interestingly in this chapter the main hostplant families are treated in separate boxes.

The book is very richly illustrated with almost 300 photographs, many really superb, and figures in the text, nearly all of them made in Suriname especially for this book, and more than 600 photographs of set butterflies on 52 plates.

In the foreword the authors write: “During the process of writing, it has become a bit of an unconventional book” and this is definitely true, a very unconventional and rich book. The senior author took a wise decision to include a botanist in the authorship: the close relationships of the caterpillars and hostplants and of the butterflies and nectar plants are very essential in understanding their ecology and their evolution, and are a hint where to find them. I have never seen a book on Lepidoptera treating this subject in such detail and I like it very much. As a lepidopterist myself I tent to study more botany literature than entomological literature when preparing for fieldwork. This book combines it all in a handy way. Even though the book deals only with a minority of the ca. 1300 butterfly species that occur in Suriname, it is already complete in many other ways. One could say it is maybe too much since so many topics are covered. But in the case of a fauna in a country where so little has been published on these subjects before, it is certainly defensible. However, the book is no longer suitable as a field guide and is better used to prepare for a trip and then left at home.

A review such as this is simply too short to describe all that can be found in the book, and I can only warmly recommend this to all people interested in butterflies and those interested in nature in Suriname and nearby countries. The price should not prevent this.

After writing this review, one of the authors told me that the book is unfortunately out of print now and the publishers are no longer in function after closure of the institute KIT. I do hope that a solution will be found to reprint this important book!

Erik van Nieukerken